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SUBJECT: ODIHR WAITS FOR INVITE FROM RUSSIA

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells
for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The wait continues for an invitation to the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to monitor Russia's upcoming Duma elections. The Central Election Commission (CEC) will not issue the invitation until it has completed registering party lists, leaving little possibility for ODIHR to conduct an assessment and long-term observer mission by December 2. In addition to the delay in issuing the invitation, the GOR is likely to attach conditions on the mission and the numbers of observers who will be allowed to participate, while arguing that it is adhering "to the comma" of the Copenhagen Declaration. ODIHR efforts to preemptively identify office space have not been successful to date. The Ambassador will push for an unconditional invitation and GOR adherence to the spirit of its OSCE commitments in an October 25 meeting with CEC Chairman Churov. End Summary.

GOR in No Rush to Issue Invitation

¶2. (SBU) In an October 19 meeting, CEC International Affairs Director Andrey Davydov confirmed that the earliest ODIHR will receive an invitation is early November, which he attributed to the CEC's priority of certifying political party candidate lists, which must be completed by October 28. Davydov suggested that this work had to be completed before the invitation could be sent, since the number of candidates approved to participate in the election will have bearing on the number of international observers. Davydov also said the GOR invitation will stipulate a reduced number of monitors from past years, although he would not reveal how many.

¶3. (SBU) Davydov expressed opposition to long-term monitors and questioned why "in this day and age" monitors are needed. He accused the OSCE of not treating Russia as a "normal country," despite a record of "successful elections" in the past. The eventual invitation, Davydov suggested, will conform with Russian proposals for reforming OSCE-ODIHR election monitoring in general, such as increasing the proportion of CIS country representatives in observer missions and restricting funding to the OSCE unified budget that would disallow funding from Western countries.

¶4. (C) At the same time, MFA Director of the Department of European Cooperation Sergey Ryabkov stressed that Russia would meet its Copenhagen commitments "to the comma." He maintained that the declaration only requires an invitation

to ODIHR and representatives of participating states to monitor elections and makes no mention of assessment teams or long-term observers. Ryabkov said the Russian Ambassador to the OSCE had asked ODIHR Ambassador Christian Strohal for documentation as to why the OSCE feels it needs to send an assessment mission to Russia. He mentioned that CEC Chairman Vladimir Churov would be traveling to Poland October 20 and would meet with Ambassador Strohal.

15. (U) In an article published in Kommersant October 23, Davydov reiterated that the election monitor issue will wait until candidate lists are registered and argued that there were no specific rules stipulating the timing of the invitation. Davydov's comments generated some opposition political comment. Independent Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov was quoted as saying international observers would be invited, but only at the last minute and, therefore, only in the final stages of the election. He noted that, in his opinion, the Kremlin needed international observers. Boris Hadezhdin, of opposition party SPS, claimed the delay was on purpose. They are trying to "cut off observers like they have cut off opposition parties," while the Communist Party's Ivan Melnikov attributed the delay to bureaucracy.

Europeans Hear Same Message

16. (C) EU Ambassadors, who met with CEC Chairman Churov October 16, heard a similar message. As recounted by one participating embassy, the Ambassadors were asked why there was a need for a large scale observer mission when "Russia has graduated from democracy school?" The Ambassadors, too, were told that the issue of the invitation would be dealt with after the CEC certified the candidate lists. According

MOSCOW 00005119 002 OF 002

to a statement posted on the CEC's web site, Russia valued openness and transparency in the electoral process and aimed to meet its obligations in inviting international election observers. Reaction from European missions to the latest developments has been universally pessimistic, while some missions speculated that the observer mission will only be permitted to monitor the elections on election day itself. A British diplomat told us the issue of observers will be on the agenda of the EU-Russia Summit taking place October 26-28 in Lisbon.

Office Space

17. (C) With time running short between now and the December 2 elections, ODIHR has sought to move forward in preparing for an observer mission, by looking for office space in Moscow and posting a recruitment notice on their web site. Their efforts to find office space to accommodate staff and 50 computers have been unsuccessful, so far. They have asked for U.S. and EU embassy advice in securing space. (Note: Absent GOR support, which ODIHR has not sought, it could be difficult to obtain the commercial space. At a minimum, it will be a costly endeavor. We are seeking to put ODIHR in contact with U.S.-financed NGOs who may be able to provide guidance on obtaining suitable property.)

Comment

18. (C) The consistency with which Russian officials are conveying their message about international election observers is a sign of GOR confidence in its strategy. The GOR appears satisfied with their compliance with the letter of the Copenhagen Declaration, although the limited observer mission they are likely to allow will fall far short of the spirit of the OSCE commitment. The Ambassador will continue

to push for a GOR invitation to ODIHR without conditions in
his October 25 meeting with CEC Chairman Churov.
Burns